Important of Social Media Connectedness for Today's Connection

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Abstract:

Social media impact college students were the positive and negative numerous ways. Researchers have begun to empirically examine impacts on students' well-being and have found some preliminary results that call for more research. Social groups provide us with an important part of our identity, and more than that, they teach us a set of skills that help us to live our lives. Feeling socially connected, especially in an increasingly isolated world, is more important than ever, to help inform interventions to support student learning and engagement as well as interventions for students who exhibit problem behaviors. Social media sites have also provided new opportunities for students to harass others via technology. Research has shown that about a quarter of college students report being cyber-bullied at some point in their lives, and about 30% of those students said they were bullied for the first time in college. It is a slightly murky field of understanding for student affairs professionals from which to draw conclusions.

Keywords: Technology, Social network sites, Peers, Development, Student Engagement.

Use of Technology by College Students

It may seem like all college students are using technology at all times, and generally speaking, there is truth to that statement. Most college students come to campus with many technology devices, using their devices for reasons both moot and personal. As of 2012, students had a clear preference for smart, mobile devices: 86% of students own laptops, 62% own smartphones, 33% own desktop computers, and 15% own a tablet. Having access to various devices, especially mobile ones, means the ability to be constantly connected with social media (Dahlstrom, 2012). Nevertheless, not all college students have the same ownership and proficiency with technology. A digital divide exists in that there are differences among gender, race, and income with college student use of technology. Further, students in the $100,000–$149,000 per year income bracket were more than three times as likely to own a cell phone than those from the median bracket. Race, gender, and income also proved to have differing outcomes: Being female, African American, and/or from the highest income brackets were positively predictive of the number of text messages sent and the amount of time spent talking on a cell phone per week (Junco, Merson, & Salter, 2010). Accordingly, college administrators need to remain sensitive to the fact that all college students do not have the equivalent degree of access to technology.

Social Networking Sites/Social Media

Social networking sites are websites that allow users to connect to one another based on shared interests, activities, or characteristics. Users can post their personal information and pictures on a profile page, which displays a list of the user's connections, also known as "friends" (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). These sites allow various forms of communication between users, such as wall posts, comments, pictures, and private messages as well as ways to tag photos in order to identify those in the picture (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Even as far back as 2007, 94% of first year students reported spending time on online social networking websites during a typical week (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007). Beyond the social networking sites themselves, the popularity of mobile technology with cell phones has provided another layer of impact on college students. Having near-constant mobile access provides opportunities for access to the Internet from any location, unsigned communication, instant sharing of information, and quick ways to take and share photos. Students are not using social media sites only at home on a computer; they are also using these sites via their cell phones. Facebook is the most popular social networking site as of 2012, with 90% of college students using it (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011; Junco, 2011a). The most recent data showed that of the 90% of students who use social networking websites, 97% said they used Facebook daily (Smith & Caruso, 2010). In one recent study of 5,414 college students, Junco (2011a) initiate that students checked Facebook a mean of 5.75 times per day. Students spent about 1 hour and 40 minutes per day on Facebook according to two recent studies (Junco & Cotten, 2012; Junco, 2011a). Junco (2011a) compiled various activities on Facebook and distilled them to a 14-item list, and then used a large sample of college students to determine activities in which they participated. This list represents the best summary of activities on Facebook for college students at this time. See Figure 1. For the college administrator, understanding the amount of time and the type of activities for which college students use them is what makes the difference with social media sites (Ellison, Stein field, & Lampe, 2011; Henry, 2012; Junco, 2011a; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010). For example, Junco (2011a) showed that time spent on Facebook commenting about, creating, or RSVP'ing to events is positively predictive of time spent in cocurricular activities, while playing games on Facebook is negatively analytical. Similarly, other studies have shown that using Facebook (Ellison et al., 2011) in certain ways leads to better psychosocial outcomes, and that using Twitter (Junco et al., 2010) in certain ways leads to better academic outcomes.

Identity Development

Unbiassed as previous generations of college students established identities as part of their student development (e.g., Chickering & Reisser 1993; Erickson, 1963), today's college students also develop their identity online through their profile and postings. Gonzales and Hancock (2011) described social networking sites as a means to provide multiple opportunities for selective self-presentation through photos, personal details, and witty comments. They stated that "social-networking sites exemplify how modern technology sometimes forces us to reconsider previously understood psychological processes" (p. 82). Social networking sites provide a method to showcase one's ideal identity in a virtual manner by updating status, posting to walls, sharing photos, and making comments on each other's Pages, in constructing their online identity. Another relevant aspect to today's students and the role of social media is the concept of the electronic tether, which has been a factor in the college student-parent relationship (Hofer, 2008). College students frequently communicate with their parents on a regular basis. Hofer and Moore (2010) found students communicated 13 times per week with parents, and Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007) found that the median number of times was 1.5 per day. At the same time, college students should be developmentally attempting to become self-regulating, autonomous individuals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The role of the cell phone, electronic communication, and social media in the relationships of college students and their parents is still being studied, but Hofer (2008) argued that those devices, acting as an electronic tether, hinders the development of autonomy of college students. Hofer and Moore's (2010) book The **I** Connected Parent discussed the topic and offered advice to parents of college students on letting go.

Relationships with Peers

Technology and social media sites can help facilitate offline social interaction for college students, not replace it (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). Jacobsen and Forste (2011) pointed out that students are multitasking, and are likely sending and receiving text messages, checking social media sites while hanging out with friends, and using those to make plans with friends. The ability to peruse photos and videos, and to find others online provides yet another method for couples to meet (Heussner, 2011). The frequent use of "checking up" as reported by Facebook users (Junco, 2011a) also applies to exromantic partners who use the social media site to conduct surveillance and that such activities are harmful. Marshall (2012) found that Facebook surveillance was associated with greater current distress over the breakup, as well as more negative feelings, sexual desire, and longing for the ex-partner, and lower personal growth. Additionally, she found that those who remained Facebook friends with the ex-partner reported fewer negative

feelings, less sexual desire, and less longing for the former partner, but lower personal growth (Marshall, 2012). Social media sites have also provided new opportunities for students to harass others via technology. Research has shown that about a quarter of college students report being cyber-bullied at some point in their lives, and about 30% of those students said they were bullied for the first time in college (Held, 2011). According to researchers, many of these cyber bullies hide behind anonymity online, adopting different personas for their bullying than for other online activities (Held, 2011). College administrators have applied student codes of conduct to harassing behavior on social media sites.

Impact on Academics and Multitasking

Even in academic settings or in settings where studying is taking place, students also divide their attention among various media sources. One study found that two-thirds of first-year college students reported using electronic media while in class, studying, or doing homework (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). Another study found that college students frequently searched for content not related to courses, used Facebook, corresponded by e-mail, talked on their cell phones, and texted while doing schoolwork (Junco & Cotten, 2012). Wood et al. (2012) found that students who used Facebook during a lecture scored significantly lower on tests on lecture material than those who were only allowed to manually take notes. This lack of focus by college students showed a negative impact on academic grades (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011; Junco & Cotten, 2012; Wood et al., 2012). As previously stated, it is more important to examine the actual use of the social media site to determine its impact than merely just the time on the site. For instance, Junco (2011a) showed that how Facebook is used is a better predictor of academic outcomes than how much time is spent on the site. Specifically, Junco (2011a) differentiated between using Facebook for merely checking up on others, as compared to actively interacting with others and engaging in real-world campus activities.

Student Engagement

Several researchers have analyzed uses of Facebook and Twitter using the Astin's construct of engagement, and they have found that there are both positive and negative outcomes from using these social media tools (Junco, 2011a; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010; Heiberger & Harper, 2008). Junco (2011a) found a mixed set of predictors: Students use Facebook in ways that are both positively and negatively related to their engagement, study habits, and on-campus involvement, depending on the specific activity. Other researchers have found a positive relationship between Facebook and engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; HERI, 2007). Other research pointed to positive relationships between social networking site usage and college student engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco, 2011b). Additionally, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) found that civic participation, life satisfaction, and social trust were related to the intensity of college students' Facebook use. Finally, La Riviere, Snider, Stromberg, and O'Meara (2012) evaluated the role of social media in campus protests, and they found that while social media acts as an accelerant for student protests and makes weak ties stronger, social media "may further disconnect students from understanding the change they seek and the best strategies to pursue".

Conclusion

Make a decision on how much social media will play a part in your personal and professional life. If you wish to keep your Facebook profile private and not allow students to be added as friends, that is perfectly fine. However, your department might wish to have a Facebook presence through a fan page or group, as appropriate.

• Take the time to learn the basics of Twitter. There is much opportunity for professional and academic interaction in this tool that allows you to keep your personal life separate.

• Enhance student engagement through the use of a common hashtag on Twitter, encouraging participants to participate virtually. Many modern major events have a unique Twitter hashtag as part of the added dimension of a "backchannel," representing individuals of a networked audience who are connected in real time who are learning with each other, and anyone can join (Bingham & Conner, 2010). Knowing that most college students own and use a smartphone regularly, adding a Twitter component to major events such as graduation adds an additional dimension of participation, focus, innovation, contributions, connections, and evaluation (Bingham & Conner, 2010).

• Educate your students about their privacy, safety, and general best practices about using social media. The information is constantly changing, and this is something that affects not only your students, but also your faculty and staff.

• Finally, Henry (2012) recommended that student development theories be revised to account for the influence of technology and social media. In addition to other research opportunities related to social media and technology use to help us better understand their impacts on college students, reconsidering student development theory in light of today's society could be a new approach to student affairs.

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